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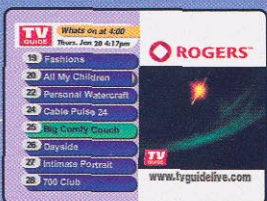
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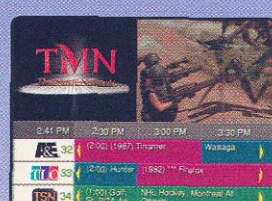
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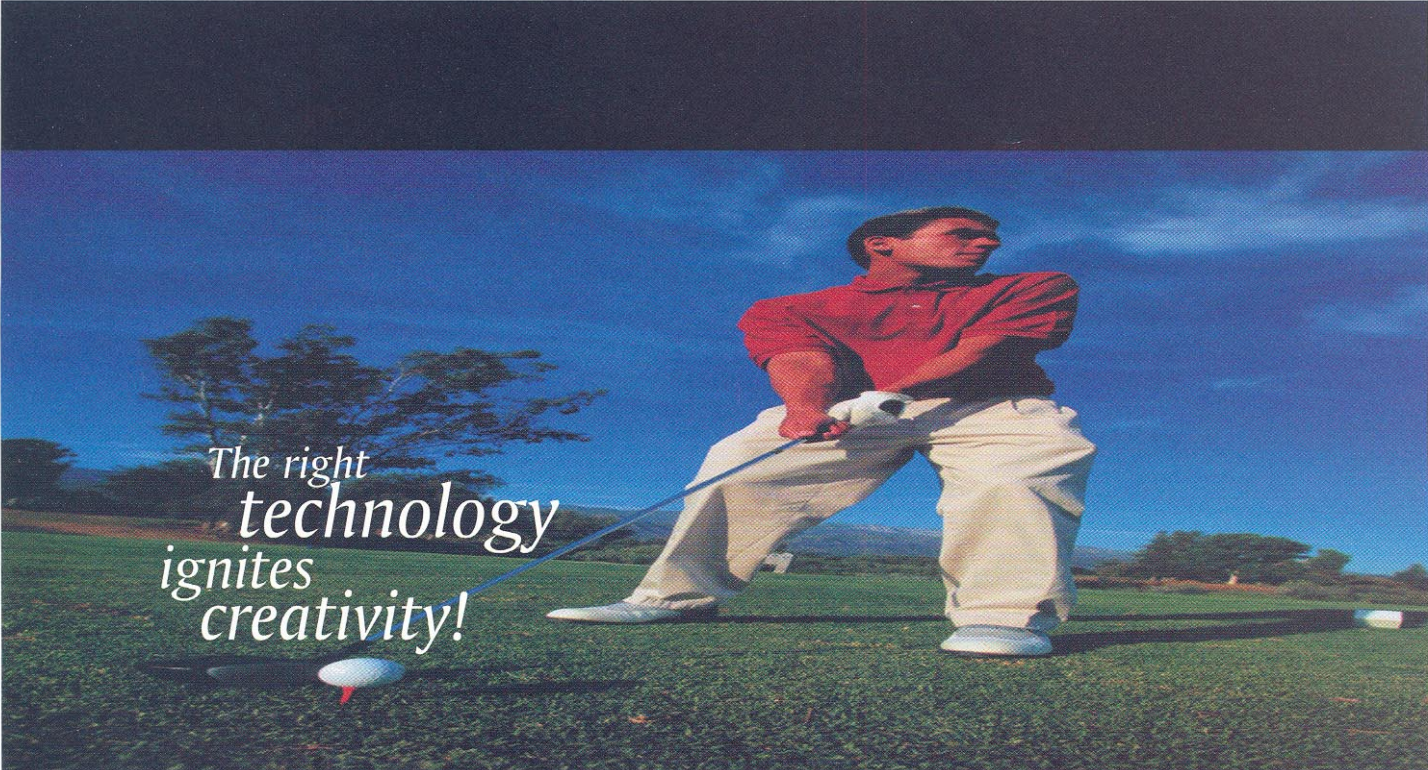


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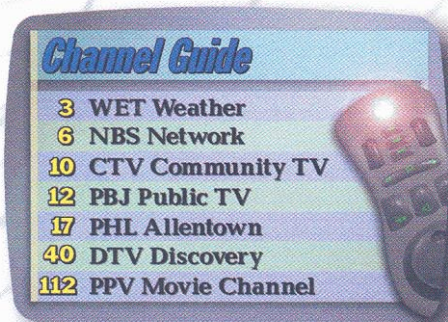
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critical to the Alliance and its membership; vigorous and thoughtful debate on those issues;  
and a venue for members and like-minded groups to present issues critical to the Alliance.*

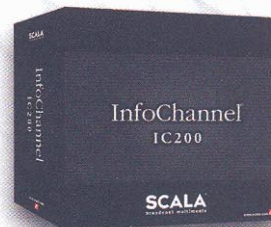


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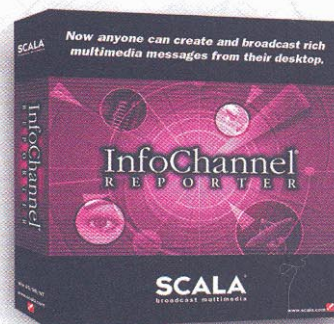


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# Access Fundamental to Media Literacy

by **Bunnie Riedel**

A few years ago, when my children were young teenagers, we took a family road trip to Missouri. At one point on the way back we were on a particularly boring strip of road in southern Iowa and in order for me to stay alert at the wheel I turned on "talk radio." Dr. Laura Schlesinger was on some AM station dispensing her usual brand of pop psychology. I ended up turning her show into a game for my kids. We would listen to the caller's dilemma, listen to Dr. Laura's answer and then I would invite my kids to comment. "Do you agree with what Dr. Laura said?" "If so, why? If not, why not?" "What would you have told the caller?"

We played that game for about two hours and I think I may have learned more during that time than my kids did. One of the things that most impressed me was how savvy my kids were in recognizing bad advice. Another thing was that my kids were fairly discerning and not willing to take as gospel the word of someone who put "doctor" before her name and was on the radio. It made me feel good as a parent that maybe somewhere along the way I had instilled in my children the ability to "think for themselves."

It is not easy these days for parents to guide their children through the confusing mass of media messages that inundate them for hours each day. For most of my children's growing years we had one television in the house and we did not have cable. I did this on purpose. I didn't want my kids to be in one room watching TV and me in another watching something else. Television was either going to be a family experience or not at all. I refused cable because I feared that with all the selection (especially programming like the Disney Channel) they would never do anything else but watch TV. We never ate dinner in front of the television because dinner for me was the one time we would all sit down together and it was the place for family conversation. I did not allow Nintendo or other video games in my house for much the same reasons. I know that at times my kids considered me a dinosaur.

*Access centers, whether they are housed in independent facilities, libraries or schools, are on the front-line of media literacy training. We take current thinking about the importance of media literacy and marry it to practical application and hands-on training.*



None of this means I was a perfect parent, or that I have raised perfect children, but I believe that my kids have the ability to question media input, rather than take everything at face value. Now that they are older, we discuss the news of the day. Sometimes I think I went a bit too far in my pontificating because both my children have a fairly cynical view of politics (very much my fault since I have raised them in a very politically charged home). But there are times when they flat-out disagree with me on an issue and I find that encouraging because it means they are thinking and not just parroting what I have to say.

Media literacy is as critical to the healthy development of our children as physical health and I believe it contributes to mental health. By the time children graduate from high school, they will have been exposed to 360,000 advertisements on television alone. Add to the TV time the time spent on the internet, where information flows like a fire-hose with far too many people taking as fact anything that gets posted or any information that gains credibility because it has a website address.

It's not just the entertainment or commercial messages, but increasingly it is the "news" that can be misleading, and news can be so subtle in its influence. I was shocked recently when a Baltimore news station showed a piece about a liquor store robbery in Colorado. There was nothing unusual or noteworthy about that robbery, it was just "another" robbery, like any number that may have taken place during the same time period in Baltimore.

My only conclusion about why that piece was included was that the station had time to fill and instead of filling it with something worthwhile going on in the community, they chose to fill it with yet another scintillating tale of crime.

Access centers, whether they are housed in independent facilities, libraries or schools, are on the front-line of media literacy training. We take current thinking about the importance of media literacy and marry it to practical application and hands-on training. If a person only spends six months involved in access on any level whatsoever, they walk away from that experience more educated about how media works and much more capable of discerning media's influence in their lives. It goes without saying that media literacy should be a curriculum standard throughout our educational system.

There are many ways that media has contributed to the quality of our lives. The information and the entertainment we take for granted in this generation was unavailable to the generations that preceded us and no doubt is rudimentary in comparison to what is to come. But we must raise our children and educate our communities to filter media input through cognitive processes. Access and access centers throughout this country are and will be fundamental to making sure media literacy receives the attention it deserves.



## CALL FOR PAPERS:

**Revitalizing Access Philosophy: The Future is Yesterday's Tomorrow.** The White Paper Committee is seeking papers and essays for presentation during a "White Paper" session within the 2001 International Conference and Trade Show of the Alliance for Community Media in Washington DC, July 11-14. Abstracts will also be considered. Author must be able to attend the White Paper session during the conference.

The single paper or essay selected for presentation will be chosen from competitive submissions. Paper and presentation should be accessible to a general audience of community media practitioners and interested parties. Session will include a significant amount of interaction with participants.

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# Strategic Collaborations Benefit Everyone

by Ric Hayes

I looked up the word collaboration in the thesaurus and found synonyms such as cooperation, alliance, teamwork, and collective action. The latter concept was exemplified by a recent experience when I attended the Great Lakes Broadcasting Conference held in Lansing, Michigan.

The GLBC is Michigan's premier broadcasting event and involves many different groups working together. This includes the Michigan Association of Broadcasters and the Society of Broadcast Engineers, among others.

The conference events included over 50 workshop seminars, more than 100 radio and television technology vendor booths and a career fair for job seekers.

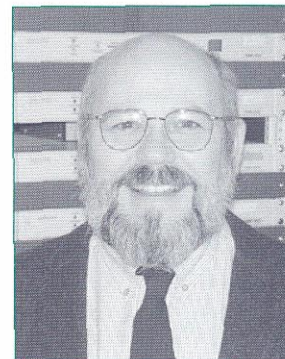
You may wonder why would a "cable guy" be attending a broadcast conference? Well in this case it is because of the collaboration between National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors (NATOA), Alliance for Community Media, and the Michigan Association of Broadcasters (MAB).

I asked Michigan attorney Neil Lehto how this networking opportunity developed. "For many years, Alliance and NATOA members had been attending the annual MAB conference to see the trade show, attend the technical production sessions and investigate career opportunities. Five years ago the Michigan NATOA chapter officer, Caren Collins, called to ask if the Michigan chapter of the Alliance would join in putting together a day-and-a-half package of programs including a joint luncheon." That productive experiment has continued for five years so far.

Lt. Governor Dick Posthumus, who addressed the need to re-tool our school systems and transform them to prepare youth for success in a high tech world, provided the conference opening remarks.

The keynote address was given by Roy H. Williams, author of "The Wizard of Ads," whose "secret formulas" are offered at his well attended training programs. In an invigorating speech he punctured common myths about human communication and related the complexity of left brain/right brain interaction in understanding the manner in which we com-

*Among the challenges facing Alliance and NATOA members are regulatory changes at the federal and state level and technological changes such as digital compression. By working together we are better equipped to find solutions to these challenges*



prehend, and react to, the world around us.

I also attended an update on cable in Michigan with representatives from Americast, Comcast, Charter and Time Warner, many of whom are in competitive "overbuilt" markets. The speakers told of their company's efforts to install and maintain the fiber optic plant necessary to offer services such as digital video, video on demand, telephony, and high-speed Internet access. All were unanimous in stating that their highest priorities were to offer unique solutions to serve community needs and provide quality customer service.

The reason I attended the conference was to represent the Alliance as the co-keynote speaker for the NATOA/Alliance luncheon. The other speaker was Elizabeth Beatty, Executive Director of NATOA. Ms. Beatty provided an overview of legislative and legal actions affecting community media and governmental interests. Her summary included the Pasadena filing to the FCC concerning franchise fees and the Henrico, Virginia 4th Circuit Appeals Court case about whether cable modem services are a cable service.

My comments dealt with the strategic partnership that the Alliance and NATOA approved last year. This agreement set the stage for collaboration on everything from joint legislative advocacy to programmatic ventures.

Of course there are differences between NATOA and the Alliance. NATOA serves the needs and interests of local governments, municipal officials, their advisors, and the staff of government access centers. The Alliance serves the

needs of individuals who work as volunteers and independent producers, the staff of PEG media centers and representatives of local governments. So yes we have different missions but I think our common interests outweigh our differences.

Among our common interests is the belief that the federal government should not preempt existing local governmental authority over use of the public rights-of-way. Local governments are simply exercising their duty to manage use of the public space on behalf of their citizens.

We also want to ensure that we operate our cable access channels in a manner that best serves our communities. We all want to promote the programming on our cable channels, select the most appropriate equipment, and have procedures that allow production of programs that attract viewers.

Among the challenges facing Alliance and NATOA members are regulatory changes at the federal and state level and technological changes such as digital compression. By working together we are better equipped to find solutions to these challenges.

Turning back to my thesaurus—unity, harmony and partnerships were other synonyms I found, but these concepts are not new to community media. We see the power of community to overcome common obstacles in our access centers every day.

*Ric Hayes is chairman of the Alliance for Community Media and director of cable operations for Miami Valley Cable Council in Centerville, Ohio. Email rhayes@mucc.net, telephone 937.438.8887 x3025.*



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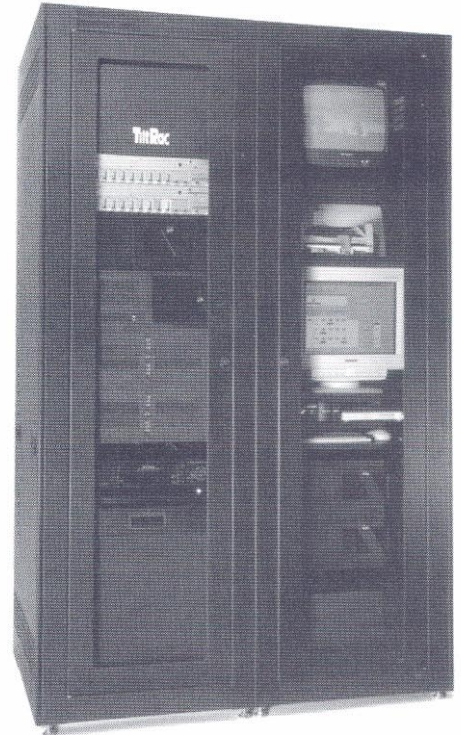
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## 'Talk Amongst Yourselves...'

Information, resources, networking and national office announcements are at your fingertips day or night. The Alliance hosts two listservs to help you:

Those interested in community media (Alliance membership not required), should send notice to subscribe to [government@alliancecm.org](mailto:government@alliancecm.org) then sign on to: [access-forum@lists.alliancecm.org](mailto:access-forum@lists.alliancecm.org)

Members only, send notice to subscribe to [government@alliancecm.org](mailto:government@alliancecm.org) then sign on to: [alliance-announce@lists.alliancecm.org](mailto:alliance-announce@lists.alliancecm.org)

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**Federal Communications Commission**  
The Portals  
445 12th St. SW  
Washington, DC 20024  
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202.418.2812 fax  
[www.fcc.gov](http://www.fcc.gov)

## Your Federal Legislators

The Honorable Sen. \_\_\_\_\_  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rep. \_\_\_\_\_  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510  
*on the web*  
<http://clerkweb.house.gov>  
*or call* 202.224.3121



## Attention Alliance Members: Looking for value-added programming?

*"Airing the Recovery Network in Dayton has positively impacted the community. This is one more level of service to our community that we provide. There are so many people in the viewing area who watch Recovery Network and get help in the privacy of their homes."*



**Melissa Mills, Program Director**  
Dayton Access TV/Dayton Spiritual Television

**Recovery Network can have an impact in your community too. Contact a representative today!**



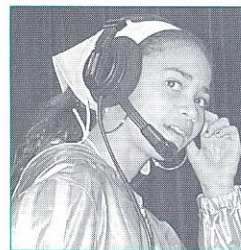
**Brad Parobek**  
SVP Affiliate Sales & Mktg  
**303-706-1260**

**Michael Galer**  
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**617-783-1271**

**Tim Somers**  
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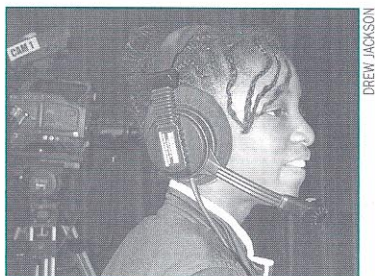
When we met for the first time at the Alliance's national conference in Tucson last summer, we both had the most amazing feeling: it was like discovering an old friend, someone you haven't seen in a long time. That process of getting re-acquainted with an old friend was rather unusual for us both—because we had never met before.



What made us feel like old friends is this: from different sides of the country, from different career paths and life trajectories, we had been deeply committed to very similar kinds of projects—designing and implementing media literacy programs in schools and communities. For both of us, the sense of urgency and importance to help media literacy become an essential life skill for young people stems from this deep commitment and passion.

This issue, **Access & Media Education: Partners**

**in the New Literacy**, represents our vision of the importance of collaboration and partnership in the emerging media literacy movement. We



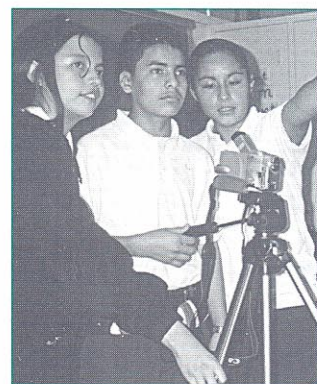
can both imagine a time, not too far in the future, when all 60 million American children in schools can have the opportunity to learn to critically analyze and create media messages. We can imagine the ways in which these experiences will transform and improve the quality of education and how the connection between the family, the school and the community will be strengthened.

We believe that media literacy, with its twin components of “asking questions about what you watch, see and read” and “creating media messages” can make good on the potential of communication to transform society. We believe that community media centers have a vitally important role to play in the media literacy movement. We hope this issue inspires you to find a partner and join us!

— Laurie Cirivello and Renee Hobbs

# ACCESS & MEDIA EDUCATION

## *Partners in the New Literacy*



*Laurie Cirivello is the executive director of the Community Media Center of Santa Rosa in Santa Rosa, California. She serves on the Western States Regional Board and has presented media literacy and access operations workshops at numerous national and regional Alliance conferences.*

*Renee Hobbs is associate professor of Communication at Babson College and a member of the board of directors of the Alliance for a Media Literate America (AMLA).*



## PROGRESS REPORT 2001 ON MEDIA LITERACY

*Take this informal quiz to see how much you know about what's new with media literacy:*

Number of U.S. states with media literacy concepts and activities embedded in state curriculum frameworks:

---

Number of educational resources (books, videos, curriculum guides) available in the latest resource catalog published by the Center for Media Literacy:

---

Number of websites accessible using the phrase "media literacy" using AOLSearch:

---

The state where 11th grade students are required to create a 7-minute investigative documentary working with a team of students:

---

Countries where media literacy education is mandated or officially required as part of K-12 instruction:

---

Name of professional medical organization that developed an education program called "Media Matters" to train its some of its 54,000 members to learn more about media literacy:

---

*For the answers, please see  
PROGRESS REPORT 2001  
on page 16.*

# WHAT IS MEDIA LITERACY?

By Renee Hobbs

Media literacy empowers people to be both critical thinkers and creative producers of an increasingly wide range of messages using image, language, and sound. It is the skillful application of literacy skills to media and technology messages. As communication technologies transform society, they impact our understanding of ourselves, our communities, and our diverse cultures, making media literacy an essential life skill for the 21st century.

Within North America, media literacy is seen to consist of a series of communication competencies, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate information in a variety of forms including print and non-print messages. Interdisciplinary by nature, media literacy represents a necessary, inevitable and realistic response to the complex, ever-changing electronic environment and communication cornucopia that surrounds us.

To become a successful student, responsible citizen, productive worker, or competent and conscientious consumer, individuals need to develop expertise with the increasingly sophisticated information and entertainment media that address us on a multi-sensory level, affecting the way we think, feel and behave.

Today's information and entertainment technologies communicate to us through a powerful combination of words, images and sounds. As such we need to develop a wider set of literacy skills helping us to both comprehend the messages we receive, and to effectively utilize these tools to design and distribute our own messages. Being literate in a media age requires critical thinking skills which empower us as we make decisions, whether in the classroom, the living room, the workplace, the board room or the voting booth.

Finally, while media literacy does raise critical questions about the complex role of media and technology and the impact of these communication forms on individuals and society, it is not an anti-media movement. Rather, it represents a coalition of concerned individuals and organizations, including educators, faith-based groups, health care-providers, and citizen and consumer groups, who seek to move "beyond blame" towards a more enlightened way of understanding our media environment.

### Many Definitions.

The term "media literacy" means different things to different people. Here are some of the meanings associated with the term:

- ▲ "Asking questions about what you watch, see and read."
- ▲ "Learning to use a wide array of communication tools and technologies to create your own messages."
- ▲ "Applying the skills of critical thinking to messages that use images, language and sound."
- ▲ "Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages using a wide variety of communication forms."

### What It Looks Like in Schools.

- ▲ First grade children learn to distinguish print and video messages whose purpose is to inform, to entertain and to persuade.
- ▲ Third graders write, design and publish their own illustrated books.
- ▲ Fifth graders identify how point-of-view shapes the way that world explorers are represented in an encyclopedia entry.
- ▲ 7th graders analyze tobacco advertising in a health class to determine how persuasive appeals are used and they create anti-commercials using the techniques they learned about.
- ▲ Teens learn to build websites in a youth after-school program.
- ▲ High school students analyze the credibility of internet web sites in a classroom research project.
- ▲ Students write and publish articles for the school newspaper.
- ▲ Young people in a religious education program analyze the ways in which violence is normalized in film and video targeted to young people.
- ▲ Students compare and contrast press coverage of a news event as depicted in a newspaper, newsmagazine, and television news report.
- ▲ A team of 10th graders research, plan, film and edit a 7-minute video documentary on the impact of changes in traffic patterns in their community.
- ▲ College students learn about the impact of media on the political process.



# PARTNERS FOR LEARNING

## COMMUNITY MEDIA & COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS

by Laurie Cirivello

Over five hundred students participated in hands-on media literacy classes in classrooms all over one mid-sized California community last year. Each six- to eight-hour workshop enrolled 20-30 students and included activities in media analysis and media production. Over 50 public service announcements were created by students and teams of interested teens took the lessons further, working to re-shoot and polish the most promising of the PSAs to air regionally on MTV, TNT and the Family Channel. To the average access organization, creating, managing and operating a program of this magnitude can sound overwhelming. Where did it come from? Who organized it? How were educators convinced of the value? And of course, *who paid for it?*

The program is but one example of what can be created when community media practitioners actively seek to understand the needs of and create programs to address to goals of educators. Who are the "educators?" In this instance the term refers to teachers and administrators in local organizations and institutions. They are individuals who are working to instruct, enlighten and empower youth and are increasingly recognizing media literacy as a teaching tool. They are school-based educators pro-



The Miracle Product: anti-tobacco PSA created by students in T.O.T.A.L.

viding curriculum and standards-based education. They are health and prevention professionals. They are members of faith-based coalitions, as well as arts organizations.

The media access practitioners are, of course, staff and volunteers who work in and through PEG access and community media centers. For decades, media centers have been providing excellent community-based media training. Though too often operating on small budgets and on the fringes of our communities,

access training in storytelling, media production and alternative uses of media are elements important to, but often lacking in the more formal media education movement.

I contend that neither community media nor institutional media educators are, by themselves, ideally equipped to undertake the complete task of media education in our communities. Access centers have many strengths. First, we have equipment and production facilities. We understand how video can be used for many purposes other than selling products. We have expertise in technical training and creation of the low-cost production. But we often struggle when trying to expand our education programs. We have limited access to institutional funding sources. We often lack teaching credentials and research and ►

	COMMUNITY MEDIA	EDUCATORS	THEMES IN COMMON
VALUES/ OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratization of media</li> <li>• Empowerment of speakers</li> <li>• Increase diversity of message</li> <li>• Increase communication and understanding among groups</li> <li>• Non-commercial speech</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach critical thinking skills</li> <li>• Teach communication skills</li> <li>• Create smart consumers</li> <li>• Build resistance</li> <li>• Keep students engaged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empower people to think and speak for themselves</li> </ul>
STRENGTHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production resources</li> <li>• Expertise in technical training</li> <li>• Experience w/low cost productions</li> <li>• Understand use of media for many purposes (as a tool)</li> <li>• Ability to articulate media literacy concepts to funders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curricular expertise</li> <li>• Extensive age-group experience</li> <li>• Access to institutional funding sources</li> <li>• Support services – research and evaluation</li> <li>• Institutional status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to hands-on learning and recognition of multimedia as the predominant language of current society.</li> </ul>
NEEDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large project history</li> <li>• Funding for new projects</li> <li>• Assistance with research and testing</li> <li>• Institutional status required for grants and credibility</li> <li>• Subject area expertise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical resources and expertise</li> <li>• New tools for motivating students</li> <li>• Methods to meet new standards</li> <li>• Time to create programs and grant proposals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separately, the partners face significant obstacles, but together there are many opportunities.</li> </ul>



# WHY STUDY THE MEDIA

## 20 IMPORTANT REASONS

by Chris M. Worsnop

1. Like history, because the media interpret the past to us to show us what has gone into making us the way we are.
2. Like geography, because the media define for us our own place in the world.
3. Like civics, because the media help us to understand the workings of our immediate world, and our individual places in it.
4. Like literature, because the media are our major sources of stories and entertainment.
5. Like literature, because the media require us to learn and use critical thinking skills.
6. Like business, because the media are major industries and are inextricably involved in commerce.
7. Like language, because the media help define how we communicate with each other
8. Like science and technology, because the media always adopt the leading edge of modern technological innovation.
9. Like family studies, because the media determine much of our cultural diet and weave part of the fabric of our lives.
10. Like environmental studies, because the media are as big a part of our everyday environment as are trees, mountains, rivers, cities and oceans.
11. Like philosophy, because the media interpret our world, its values and ideas to us.
12. Like psychology, because the media helps us (mis)understand ourselves and others.
13. Like science, because the media explain to us how things work.
14. Like industrial arts, because the media are carefully planned, designed and constructed products.
15. Like the arts, because through the media we experience all the arts as no other age has ever done.
16. Like politics, because the media bring us political and ideological messages all the time—yes—all the time.
17. Like rhetoric, because the media use special codes and conventions of their own languages that we need to understand.
18. Like drama, because the media help us understand life by presenting it as larger-than-life, and compel us to think in terms of the audience.
19. Like Everest, because they are there.
20. BECAUSE THE MEDIA GO TO GREAT LENGTHS TO STUDY YOU.

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assessment resources. We may lack credibility in the environment of formal school-based education.

On the other hand, educators in elementary and secondary school are age-group and curricular specialists. They have access to institution specific funding resources. They have extensive support systems; and they have credibility and institutional status in the community. But they don't have much technical experience, often minimal access to appropriate equipment and facilities, and little time to learn new skills. Yet, they are under pressure to meet new educational standards while keeping students engaged. The assessment looks similar when applied to health departments, recreation programs, and teen centers.

In the chart on the preceding page, notice how the needs of access can, in large part, be addressed by the strengths of the institutional partners. Likewise the needs of the institution are areas in which access excels. And by understanding our "themes in common" we know where to begin discussions with our partners that will keep us focused on meeting everyone's objectives.

What do these principles look like when put into practice?

One example is a partnership program between traditional educators and media access in Santa Rosa, CA. The program highlighted at the beginning of this article is *Teens Opposed To Advertising Lies* or TOTAL. TOTAL is a tobacco education program that uses media literacy as a tool. It was designed jointly by Community Media Center and school district staff with input from health department advisors. It is paid for largely by a grant from the California Department of Education, which funds tobacco use prevention efforts. Note that media literacy was not the focus of the grant but instead a very compelling (and research supported) method to teach to the subject. The grant (\$90,000 for two years) was awarded to the school district. The district retained 5 percent for program assessment services and the remainder went to direct service delivery by the Community Media Center.

Teachers have welcomed the program as an exciting way to teach health and language skills lessons. The local health department has welcomed the Media Center as an important partner in local health education. The funds have allowed the media center to hire a full-time youth trainer who not only works with TOTAL but with other youth programs at the center. And most of all, kids love it and are becoming smarter and more savvy consumers of media messages.

The same model can be used for anti-violence projects, after-school programs, teens as artists' proposals, and more. The key is recognizing media literacy and production as a tool to service the objectives of organizations and institutions in our community. It's not about making TV, it's about making a difference. At the Community Media Center in Santa Rosa we are now applying this same partnership model of program design and funding to new educational projects. Next up? An exciting partnership between the California Human Development Corporation, Listen Up! and The Community Media Center serving the adolescent children of immigrant farm workers. Stay tuned.

*Laurie Cirivello is the executive director of the Community Media Center of Santa Rosa in Santa Rosa, California. She serves on the Western States Regional Board and has presented media literacy and access operations workshops at numerous national and regional Alliance for Community Media conferences. Email: lcirivello@communitymedia.org*

*When we compare our values, strengths and challenges, we can build coalitions that meet the goal of helping kids grow up strong in an electronic world.*



# FINDING MEDIA LITERACY IN STATE CURRICULUM STANDARDS

By Robert Kubey and Frank Baker

More than a decade ago, Ernest L. Boyer, then the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, concluded: "It is no longer enough simply to read and write. Students must also become literate in the understanding of visual images. Our children must learn how to spot a stereotype, isolate a social cliché, and distinguish facts from propaganda, analysis from banter, and important news from coverage."

We are pleased to report that there are unmistakable and hopeful signs of development. Only a few years ago, a mere handful of states had curricular guidelines that called for media education. In November of 1998, *The New York Times* reported that only 12 states were so situated. But by examining current educational frameworks in the states, we have found to our own surprise—and that of all the media educators with whom we've spoken—that all 50 states' curricular frameworks now contain one or more elements calling for some form of media education.

We examined the curricular objectives and educational goals from frameworks available by direct query to state departments of education or via the Internet. All but a few are on the World Wide Web, and we have listed them with direct links at [www.med.sc.edu:81/medialit](http://www.med.sc.edu:81/medialit). These resources will be valuable to community access leaders who are beginning to engage in dialogue with school officials about collaborative efforts involving media production opportunities for young people. Here are some examples from our study of how media education is being incorporated into state frameworks under each of the major curricular categories we employed:

**▲ Language and Communication Arts.** North Carolina's language/communication arts viewing strand—in our estimation, one of the best-conceived in the country—reads as follows:

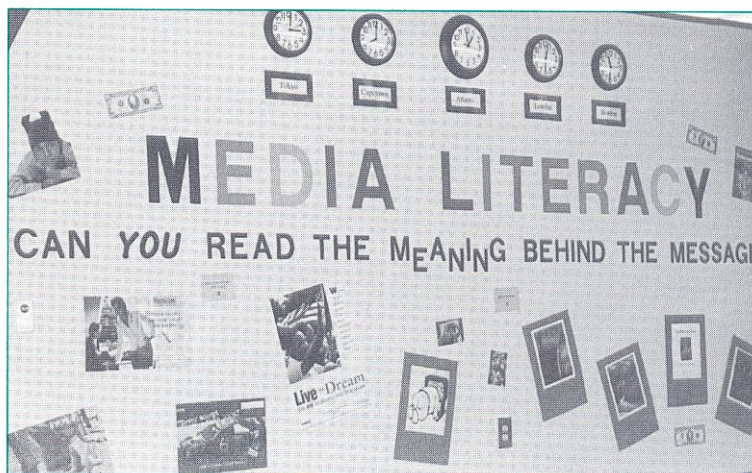
"It is an important goal of education for learners to be able to critique and use the dominant media of today. Visual literacy is essential for survival as consumers and citizens in our technologically intensive world. Learners will appreciate various visual forms and compositions, compare and contrast visual and print information, formulate and clarify personal response to visual messages, evaluate the form and content of various visual communications, identify and interpret main ideas and relevant details in visual representations, apply insights and strategies to become more aware and active viewers in their leisure time, relate what is seen to past experience, convey and interpret ideas through nonprint media, recognize the persuasive power of visual representations."

**▲ Social Studies.** California's history/social sciences research framework for grades 9-12 is among the most complete. Here is one section:

"Students evaluate, take, and defend positions on the influence of the media on American political life, in terms of: (1) the meaning and importance of a free and responsible press, (2) the

role of electronic, broadcast, print media, and the Internet as means of communication in American politics, (3) how public officials use the media to communicate with the citizenry and to shape public opinion."

**▲ Health, Consumer Skills.** In comparison with those of language arts and social studies, media elements in the curricular frameworks for health are particularly focused. Health educators are especially inclined to use the analysis of media messages in direct ways to get students to consider whether and how the media may encourage unhealthy habits.



*The curriculum standards for all 50 states now contain one or more elements calling for some form of media education.*

West Virginia, for example, calls on students to "analyze media influence on tobacco and alcohol [use] and develop counter-advertisements for peer education." One of Missouri's "health maintenance and enhancement" frameworks calls on students from grades 9-12 to "evaluate the idealized body image and elite performance levels portrayed by the media and determine the influence on a young adult's self-concept, goal setting, and health decisions."

Overall, we concluded that Texas unquestionably presents the most developed and comprehensive media education framework. Florida's and North Carolina's also are impressive. That all states now have one or more media education elements in their curricular frameworks represents a watershed moment in the country's educational history. Writers of the state frameworks have recognized the overwhelming and pervasive presence of media in our lives and are increasingly including language that allows teachers to integrate media education into the formal classroom setting.

But no one should interpret our enthusiasm for this progress to mean we believe that any state's media education goals are being adequately met. Guidelines and mandates do not always translate into implementation, quality, or systematic evaluation. New Mexico and Massachusetts, followed by Utah, Texas, and ►



Minnesota, probably have the greatest proportion of students actually receiving media education.

Educators must finally recognize that the way we communicate as a society has changed enough in this century that traditional training in literature and print communication is no longer sufficient by itself. Clearly, we must provide teachers with sufficient in-service training to integrate media education into their teaching. But education schools have a lot of catching up to do.

Our own informal survey of graduate schools of education shows all too many of them concluding that it is adequate merely to train future teachers to thread a 16mm projector or show students a film version of *Great Expectations*. Quite a few go further, in instructing future teachers how to have students complete an assignment using multimedia. But there remains precious little analysis or evaluation of media, or much recognition that language arts instruction in such standard topics as foreshadowing, representation, character development, and symbolism might extend beyond print.

So, while we have documented impressive developments in curricular frameworks, we find the educational establishment still often mystified about to how to retool and retrain to educate future citizens for the new realities of communication.

By contrast, since the mid-1990s, Australian language teach-

*The educational establishment is still often mystified about to how to retool and retrain to educate future citizens for the new realities of communication.*

ers have been required to teach non-print media from kindergarten through the 12th grade. The Canadian province of Ontario has required media education in grades 7-12 since 1987 and now all Canadian provinces formally call for media education. In England last year, approximately 25,000 students took their national gcse exams (for 16-year-olds), and 14,200 university-bound 18-year-olds sat for their A levels, or advanced-level exams, in media studies. And Scotland is ahead of England in media education.

If we factor in South Africa, which has led the United States for some time in the delivery of media education, America comes in last among

the world's major English-speaking countries in teaching for this crucial form of modern literacy.

If most of our students are going to spend 2,000 or more hours each year for the rest of their lives in contact with the electronic media, isn't it time for us to learn new ways of teaching and to engage in formal media education?

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## PROGRESS REPORT 2001 ON MEDIA LITERACY

### ANSWERS for page 13

▲ **Number of U.S. states with media literacy concepts and activities embedded in state curriculum frameworks:** An article in *Education Week* (October 27, 1999) reported on a study that examined the curricular objectives and educational goals from state frameworks. They assessed where the media education elements in a state's frameworks appeared, finding that 46 states have media literacy in English, language, and communication arts; 30 states have it in social studies, history, and civics; 30 states have media literacy in health, nutrition, and consumerism.

▲ **Number of educational resources (books, videos, curriculum guides) available in the latest resource catalog published by the Center for Media Literacy:** There are 175 resource materials available in the CML 2001 catalog. There has been a tremendous growth in the quality and quantity of materials developed over the past 10 years. Mainstream publishers like Holt, Rinehart, Winston have incorporated media literacy into their educational publications for students and teachers.

▲ **Number of websites accessible using the phrase "media literacy" using AOLSearch:** There are 768 sites accessible via AOLSearch in January 2001. Using Yahoo, we find 23 and using Google, we find 418,000 sites.

▲ **The state where 11th grade students are required to create a 7-minute investigative documentary working with a team of students:** The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) states: "Students will create media products to include a 7- to 10-minute documentary, ad campaigns, political campaigns, or video adaptations of literary texts to engage specific audiences." Unfortunately, based on work with Texas teachers, we estimate that only

about five percent of Texas students get this opportunity, however, due to teachers' lack of confidence and skills in implementing this activity. Teacher education and training continues to be the greatest need in bringing these experiences to young people.

▲ **Countries where media literacy education is mandated or officially required as part of K-12 instruction:** England, Scotland, Wales, Australia and Canada all include media literacy as an essential component of English language arts education. England has required media literacy education since 1987 and has the most developed programs, teacher training, research and resource materials.

▲ **Name of professional medical organization that developed an education program called "Media Matters" to train its some of its 54,000 members to learn more about media literacy:** The American Academy of Pediatrics launched this campaign in 1998. It includes regional conferences, resource materials for pediatricians to give parent outreach talks, and a "media history" questionnaire to be used in an office visit to assess a child's use of video games, television, computers, and other media. Other health organizations that have provided funding for media literacy include the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institutes on Drug Abuse (NIDA), and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). Media literacy has been formally recognized as a "promising practice" in prevention education, helping children to make healthy lifestyle choices by affecting attitudes and behaviors about the media.



# COMMUNICATION ARTS

## A MAGNET FOR STUDENTS

by Heidi Whitus

*M*y classroom is a disciplinarian's nightmare: noisy teenagers all over the room, some in blatant violation of the dress code. Many of the students are not even in the classroom, but fighting in the hallways or climbing trees in the woods on our campus. But look closely and you'll see that all the students are doing *exactly* what they're supposed to be doing because each group has a video camera. The strange clothes are costumes, the hallway is a set for a PSA on school violence, and climbing a tree enables a really cool high angle shot. These kids are so engrossed in their projects that they would never think of doing the wicked things we suspect teenagers do when they are unsupervised. That would take away precious time from their production schedule!

Communications Arts High School in San Antonio, Texas is a public magnet school. That means that students from all over our extremely large district must apply as 8th graders to be accepted to our program. Our mission is not necessarily to train kids for careers in the communications industry, but rather to give them skills they will need for college and for most professions in the future. Video production is a required class for all sophomores, and we also offer an Advanced Video Production class. In addition to the usual core subject area classes, students also take a full-year speech course, an independent study in multimedia, three years of Spanish (because of our geographic and cultural proximity to Mexico), and a one semester mentorship with a professional in a field chosen by the student.

Our equipment is basic: four Super-VHS camcorders and heavy-duty tripods, a light kit, a dolly (but "rolly chairs" are just as popular and car sunshades serve as reflectors). We do our editing on PCs with Adobe Premiere, but before the kids can get on the computers I make them edit one project "in-camera" and another project with a linear VCR to VCR setup. Because the equipment belongs to the students, I never have to worry about them abusing it. They know if a camera is broken, they are the ones who will suffer. Rarely is a camera not returned to its proper place at the end of class. In four years, with over 100 students each year, we have had only two major mishaps, both when a camera was left unattended on a tripod.

Theory is an important part of my program. Because of the fleeting nature of technology, I give lectures and demonstrations on timeless lessons such as composition, design principles, editing aesthetics, sound and image relationships. And my students



are so versed in pre-production skills they can't think without a storyboard blank in front of them. Right now, we have 25 30-second PSAs in production, on topics such as beer advertisers who target kids, domestic violence, and hate crimes. An advanced student is producing a series of videos on driving safety in the wake of four recent car crash deaths at our school. Another girl is making a documentary on the history of music recording in San Antonio, using her grandfather as a primary source.

Video production (as well as multimedia) skills are remarkably empowering for teenagers. For most people, mass media are encountered as remote, omnipotent, one-way forces. Understanding through firsthand experience just what it takes to perfectly light a juicy-looking hamburger, though, allows for thoughtful deconstruction rather than mindless assimilation of a Burger King commercial. Inevitably my students tell me that my class has "ruined them," they can't watch movies or TV without analyzing camera angles or scrutinizing the subtext of a junk food jingle. Of course, what seems like a nagging habit to them now will become unconscious intellectual enterprise later on.

In addition to the indirect analysis the students learn through video production, a generous portion of time is spent on explicit media literacy inquiries. I firmly believe that critical skills based on popular culture transfer to their other classes. For example, teenagers can quickly engage in a discussion on the use of social satire in *The Simpsons*, because it is a shared "text" that they are almost all very familiar with. Then they take what they know about satire and apply it to a discussion of Mark Twain in their English class, and their understanding is deeper.

Using media as a springboard for dialogue enables me to understand my students in a special way because of the vehement feelings that media evokes in teenagers. An opening chat about Eminem's controversial appearance at the Grammy Awards can turn into an ardent half-hour discussion where we all learn about each others' musical tastes and political opinions. Some teachers might view this as a waste of time, but my students are now media activists rather than passive consumers. And with the prospect of digital transmission, with 20 channels for every currently used frequency, the chances are high that many of my students will indeed go on to become media producers in the future.

*Heidi Whitus is a video production teacher at the Communication Arts Magnet High School in San Antonio, Texas. email: hwhitus@hotmail.com.*

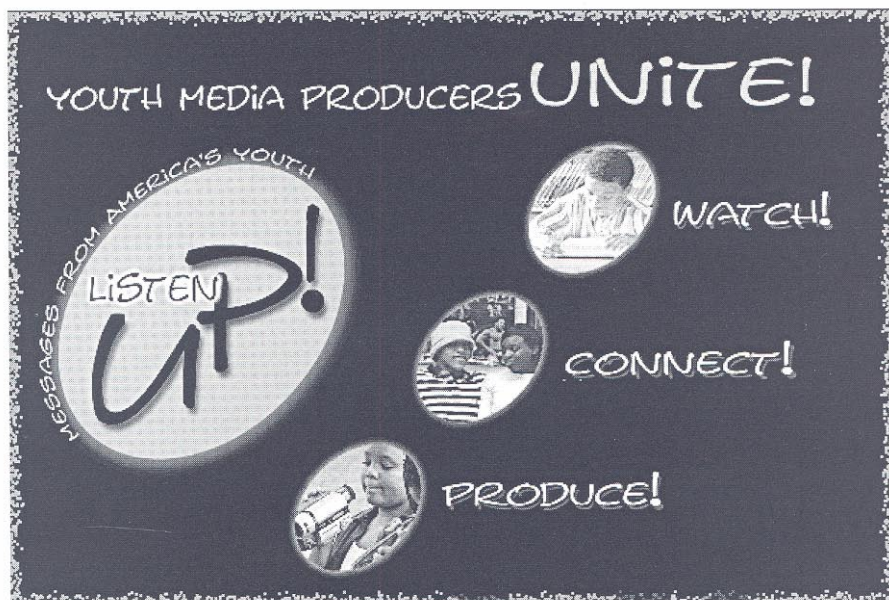


# LISTEN UP! BUILDS A YOUTH MEDIA COALITION

Since January, 1999, Listen Up! has engaged more than 1,000 youth from diverse backgrounds in the researching, writing, production, editing and distribution of their own media. *Listen Up!* is a network of youth media producers from all across the country who are contributing messages for a public service campaign. By creating these messages, producers are learning important life and communication skills. And even more importantly, they are portraying themselves and their peers in a positive light, on their own terms, and in their own voices. They are applying their understanding and skills in media in a very powerful way.

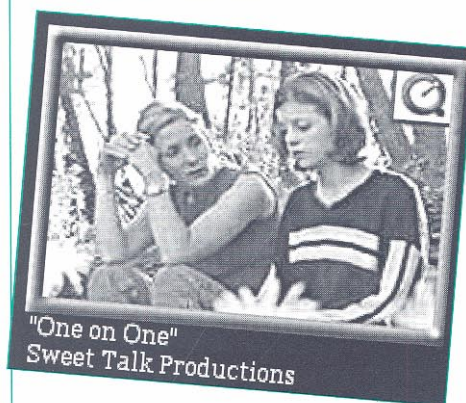
One of the most important tools of *Listen Up!* is the website which features video streaming of more than 150 youth generated pieces that speak from the hearts and voices of young people. Prominent on the site is this revealing disclaimer: "The following messages were made by young media producers who say exactly what they think. Some viewers may experience difficulties with free speech. Side affects may include deep thought and reflecting upon one's own values. See a youth if problems persist. Parental discretion in NOT advised. (But a sense of humor is)." In addition to streaming video of youth projects, the site is an excellent connection point for youth and those serving youth. Links to resources, contests and other opportunities are updated frequently.

One example of a *Listen Up!* partner project is *Video Machete* from Hull House in Chicago, led by veteran media literacy leader, Chris Bratton. *Video Machete* helps youth to represent their experiences and struggles using their own voices. With the support of a community of artists and media activists, young people use these experiences to become critical thinkers and social actors for positive change. One team of young women are creating PSAs to provide a positive image



**Listen Up! provides opportunities for youth media programs to coordinate their efforts.**

of working Latina women. The Hull House project is helping to empower immigrant youth to vocalize their fears through communication projects about racism. *Video Machete* provides public screenings of their work as well through local TV venues. Videos available for web viewing list titles including *Your Life is Your Own*, *Gang Ordinance*, *Condom Man* and *Listen to Us*.



Forty-seven partner organizations are listed on the *Listen Up!* website. These organizations work with the students—training and providing equipment—so that youth producers can get their message out. The groups vary in structure, but all have at their core a mission to help youth harness the power of media to speak for themselves. Partner organizations include PEG Access centers (such as Access Tucson and Houston Media Source), local chapters of traditional youth serving groups (4-H in Glasgow, MT, The Urban League, Denver CO) and innovative youth video projects such as

*Animaction* (Hollywood, CA) and *Scoop* (Detroit, MI). There are also a number of school-based projects like Robertson High School in Las Vegas, NV, which have joined with *Listen Up!* Each year, the organization selects a number of partners and offers small assistance awards of up to \$5,000 to help defray costs associated with youth production of PSAs. Additional organizational support for contributing sites includes:

- ▲ National distribution of youth-produced messages;
- ▲ A network of youth media organizations and producers;
- ▲ Organizational promotion and publicity;
- ▲ Timely information on funding and festivals;
- ▲ Compilation reels.

Working together as a national network, *Listen Up!* helps to create a strong sense of solidarity among its producers. This partnership supports the development of an open climate for youth media production, helping to make funders and distributors more receptive to youth media production. The organization is also a vehicle for youth media producers to share ideas, exchange information, and critique each other's work. For more information about *Listen Up!* and to view the youth productions visit their website at [www.listenup.org](http://www.listenup.org).



Local cable access and schools—a natural match, right? Well, not really. As one who's worked on both sides of this often-strained partnership, I suspect that the many of the difficulties preventing a true partnership come from the 3 Ps: differing purposes, procedures, and politics.

Public Access TV and education have different purposes. Access is product-driven, while education is process-driven. Access TV wants programming—that's what they do. At my local access center, it's quite simple: you can use access equipment for anything as long as it results in airable programming (One enterprising couple even taped and edited their wedding on access equipment, figuring that one public broadcast of the tape was not only fun, but also a lot cheaper than paying for a private video). Schools, on the other hand, are more about learning than about creating a finished product. Learning involves mistakes. Not every activity with a camcorder is appropriate for public airing, and not all video production activities in schools result in programming for local access centers. This is a problem.

Another problem is differing procedures (or rules) in access centers and schools which make cooperation difficult (if not impossible). When our local access center wouldn't build a production facility within our high school, I decided to bring my video production classes to the access center for training (if the mountain won't come to Mohammed, right?). But the access center's hours of operation were 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Since school runs from 7:15 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., so only half of each day was available for us to use the studio. The access center was unwilling to either give me a key or ask a staff member to report to work three hours early, but I still proceeded with my plans—until I came up against high school procedures.

The access center was located less than 500 feet from the high school, and I had thought there'd be no problem in just gathering my class and walking over there. Wrong! School administrators informed me that any travel off school grounds constituted a "field trip"—which necessitated permission slips, parental signatures, and administration approval each time I wanted to bring kids over to the studio. Sigh.

I tried to have my students sign-out video equipment from the studio, but it turns out that the insurance company which covers access requires anyone signing-out equipment to be over 18. Insurance and liability matters, you understand. When I argued that (by definition) most high school students are under 18, the access corporation decided to be flexible and allow parents to sign-out equipment for their children. Double Sigh.

The handwriting was on the wall.

# NATURAL MATCH?

## LOCAL CABLE ACCESS & SCHOOLS

by Bill Walsh

And then there are the politics. Whether it's big city or small town politics, they're hard to ignore (and nearly impossible to navigate). One year, I actually got a few camcorders for my students to work with, and I set the kids to work on public service

announcements. Cool, huh? We could show them on access TV (so they'd get programming). It would make the students look public-spirited and all—everyone would be happy, right?

One group of kids produced an excellent anti-drug spot. In tight close-up, we saw a kid's hand very slowly loading multi-colored drug capsules into the chambers of a gun. He held the gun up to his head, and then there were the suspenseful quick-cuts between his finger pulling slowly on the trigger and the hammer of the gun moving backwards. Finger. Hammer. Finger. Hammer. At the inevitable explosion, the screen went black, and the message about drugs being as deadly as guns was displayed. It was great!

School administrators refused to let us air it. Why?

"Well, if we show this anti-drug spot (and it really is very good, by the way) to the entire community, they may wonder if we have a drug problem here in the high school—which we don't. Why would we do an anti-drug commercial if there wasn't a problem?" the administrator reasoned with me. "Grade the kid on his video, but don't show it publicly."

Whew.

But perhaps the biggest political problem in my town that gets in the way of access-education partnership involves (of course) money. There's envy and suspicion (and a bit of miserliness, to tell the truth) on both sides of the fence. The school department is waiting for the access corporation to fund educational access by finally buying some equipment for use in the schools. And the access corporation is hesitant to fund something that the school budget won't. It's the old, "No, you go first!" problem. Educators can't (or won't) fund video production facilities alone, and neither will access—each figures it's the job of the other.

There are places where public access TV works hand-in-hand with local educators, and (frankly), those folks ought to be congratulated for their flexibility and cooperation. Negotiating purposes, procedures, and politics between two publicly-funded (and often fiercely independent) entities is tough.

It's worth doing, of course.

But like many things worth doing, it ain't easy.

Bill Walsh is a veteran high school English teacher and a former board member of his community's local access center. He writes a regular media literacy column for his local newspaper, which is accessible on the internet. Email: WillWalsh@aol.com.

**Violence Prevention.** *I firmly believe that more media literacy instruction can be very useful in our efforts to promote tolerance and combat violence. With the increased exposure of young people to an incredibly broad array of messages from an equally broad array of media messengers, it's all the more important that we teach our young people how to make sense of what they're seeing, hearing, and feeling. We need to teach them how to separate fact from fiction and fantasy. Only if we provide appropriate guidance can we expect our young people to understand that not everything on the screen has a place on the street corner or the classroom.*

—Former US Attorney General Janet Reno, 1999



# LESSONS LEARNED

## HOW WE DEVELOPED A MEDIA LITERACY PROGRAM

by Mark Kelsey

One thing is certain: doing media literacy raises questions that cannot be answered in a simple sound bite. Consider some of the following questions:

▲ Is a comprehensive approach to K-12 media in the real world of an urban school system even possible?

▲ Is partnering between vastly different kinds of organizations such as small non-profit organizations and large school systems possible? How can you develop a program that fits such disparate cultures?

▲ How do you create institutional change in a school system where, historically, the very concept seems to be an oxymoron?

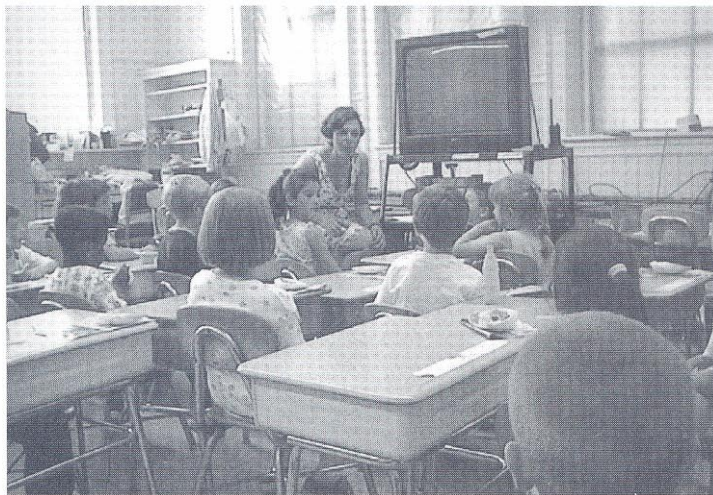
The Media Arts Education Program (MAEP) is a collaborative effort between Cambridge Community Television, the Cambridge Public Schools, and the Agassiz Neighborhood Council. This project is funded by a three-year Educational Partnership Initiative grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

We started with planning and assessment of needs and opportunities, then we moved into work with students and teachers in classrooms. Next we developed special media literacy and video production programs with our partners. Now we are working to build meaningful relationships with school leaders throughout the district. Now in its second implementation year, our strength has been in fostering institutional change, according to independent evaluation from Lesley University. This has been accomplished by 1) meeting stakeholders' needs as they arise, and 2) building on existing media programs already successful within a large urban school district. Here's a summary of some of the lessons we learned:

### **You Like Starting With An Organizational "Challenge?"**

Time and money are always key challenges when it comes to developing new programs. We started with a great deal of supervision, support, and program development time. But due to a delay in passing the state budget, we had less than five months to complete what had been planned to accomplish in nine months. We were told it was impossible to start a school-based program after September, but we had to start in February. It meant that we could be forthright about what little we could accomplish. Asking all partners to agree to reduce expectations resulted in more time to develop programs based on strategic assessments. This reduced errors we likely would have made otherwise.

**Starting with What Works.** After assessing existing programs in the school district, we discovered that building on existing programs was easiest at the elementary level. Agassiz Elementary School Principal Dr. Sybil Knight was eager to have the MAEP and made media literacy a goal in her school improvement plan. Our



third grant partner, the non-profit Agassiz Neighborhood Council, located close to the school, provides after school opportunities for students. We opened a MAEP Media Lab with new Apple G4 computers (using iMovie, Photoshop, and Final Cut Pro) and two mini-DV camcorders this past fall. Not originally part of our budget, the \$7,000 cost was funded jointly by the three organizational partners.

The Agassiz School already boasted an educator who was

teaching media literacy, and students created a daily closed circuit *Agassiz School News Show* in a program run by the school library specialist. In addition to the MAEP Media Lab, we helped on the technical side and expanded the 8th grade media literacy class. The class is creating "mini docs" which support the work of classroom teachers and connects to the state Social Studies Frameworks/curricula. Students create historical biographies for Black History Month and Women's History Month. These videos will be shown on the morning news show. This "positive feedback loop" featuring students' work has been identified as a key method to bring everyone in the local educational community together.

**Coordinating with Teachers Interests and Concerns about Media.** Thanks to children injuring each other by imitating WWF wrestling moves that they saw on TV, school teachers appreciate the need for an expanded 14-week media literacy program, even if they have a hard time fitting it in the school day. We have designed the program so that teachers are an integral part of the program. We use three instructors in a classroom when 25 students are working in teams to videotape their storyboards.

We emphasized the study of advertising and commercialism. Examples include misleading toy ads and behind-the-scenes of commercial production. Clips from the HBO series *Buy Me That, Too!* were used. While units on stereotypes and violence help reinforce what teachers are doing, teachers seemed shy and nervous about taking on commercialism and advertising. It seemed a little like the anxiety that educators have about sex ed!

**Offering Professional Development.** We provided a number of media literacy and video production workshops for teachers as part of their professional development. We tried a variety of different formats: one-day introductions, three-day intensive seminars, and after-school workshop formats. We held many training opportunities to educators throughout the school district. This summer we will focus training on middle grade teachers and media library specialists. What have we learned? Professional development is an art form.

**The Wave of the Future: After School Programs.** Our non-



profit partner, the Agassiz Neighborhood Council, discovered that the after-school program for middle-school students was a big success! Open to students system-wide, students from other schools who don't have media literacy or video production opportunities flock to it. We are now establishing ties to other after school programs in the system and hope to expand next year.

#### Using the Educational Access Channel.

Making the connection to the High School Educational Access Channel have been important. The channel actively reaches out to find video produced in the system. Interns shoot and edit programs that otherwise would not be finished or seen. This isn't an afterthought, but the crucial 'feedback loop' between our media makers and their community.

**Expanding Partnerships.** Health and prevention educators have embraced media literacy in the state of Massachusetts. In the middle school, there is an emphasis on teaching students to analyze media messages about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. As a result of this participation with health and prevention teachers, we were able to meet other non-profit organizations with programs at other schools—many people in the school system didn't even know these programs existed. One immediate result was in the area of system-wide outreach. a revamped "Safety and Family Day" later this spring. Media literacy workshops for parents and students will be a key component to lure parents who might otherwise avoid traditional events or discussions of drugs and alcohol.

**Building Team Spirit for Access.** Thanks to a grant for a new computer lab at CCTV, some of our staff members were able to learn to use curricula from the Center for Digital Storytelling (Berkeley, California). We then developed CCTV's Summer Media Institute (a.k.a. 'Digital Bootcamp'), a six-week, 20-hour a week summer workshop for inner city teens using Premiere, PhotoShop and mini-DV cameras. Digital Bootcamp provided a way for our instructors to try out new curriculum materials and new approaches to student media produc-

tion. Additional positive outcomes for our access center were a direct result of this program: two students now work at CCTV, others volunteer on public access shows, another helps her friends make public access TV shows.

**Generating System-Wide Support.** We learned the importance of identifying all the stakeholders and involving them in developing the program, avoiding the tendency to work in isolation apart from school leaders. The new Media Arts Advisory Committee is the result of our efforts. This group started as the participatory working group in developing and supporting the original Cultural Council grant. Now this group has become the agent for system-wide policy and action. This group involves all the school district's stakeholders in bringing media literacy and video production to students, including the high school TV teacher, the art department's strong digital media center, the head of technology, the head of libraries, and those of us at Cambridge Community TV. We discovered that this group provides the only regularly scheduled time for many of the school's media staff to meet! Improved relationships between elementary, high school and central administration on issues of technology and media literacy are the most successful result so far, according to our independent evaluators.

**What We Learned.** The success of the Media Arts Education Program has been through building an active learning community, by asking people what they want, not telling them what they need. Not coincidentally, patience, persistence, and community-building have been the same keys to success of public access in the United States over the past 25 years. In just over a year, the Cambridge Media Arts Education Program has begun to pose some preliminary answers to the questions of successful partnering and creating institutional change in a school system.

*Mark Kelsey is the program manager of the Media Arts Education Program, a collaborative project of the Cambridge Public Schools, Cambridge Community Television and the Agassiz Neighborhood Council. Email: mk@cctvcambridge.org*

## THOUGHTS OF OTHERS

### Expose Hidden Agendas

*Huge and powerful industries—alcohol, tobacco, junk food, guns, diet—depend upon a media-illiterate population. Indeed they depend on a population that is disempowered and addicted. These industries will and do fight our efforts with all their mighty resources. And we will fight back, using the tools of media education which enable us to understand, analyze, interpret, to expose hidden agendas and manipulation, to bring about constructive change, and to further positive aspects of the media".*

—Jean Kilbourne, Author of *Deadly Persuasion*

### Philosophy 101

*If, as Aristotle said, "The unexamined life is not worth living," so, in today's life, the unexamined culture is not worth living in.*

—George Gerbner, Bell Atlantic Professor of Telecommunication, Temple University, Philadelphia

### New Literacy

*It is no longer enough simply to read and write. Students must also become literate in the understanding of visual images. Our children must learn how to spot a stereotype, isolate a social cliché, and distinguish facts from propaganda, analysis from banter, and important news from coverage."*

—Ernest Boyer, Former US Commissioner of Education



1. Remind your school system to read the city cable contract! Public schools should get a portion of franchise fees for capital and operating, but only if they ask for it during negotiations.
2. Develop your access center's training culture to focus on successful adult learner models used in adult education and professional development.
3. Access centers need to develop a track record of outside funding and grant writing over a long period of time, not just a year or two.

—Jeffrey Hansell, executive director of Malden [MA] Access TV



# CONNECTING THE DOTS

by Dan Villalva

We've all seen movies that begin with seemingly unrelated scenes. The date types onto the screen: June 25, 1968. We see a man holding currency in his hands, arguing with a bank teller. Fade to: August 13, 1981. Before a phalanx of reporters President Ronald Reagan signs the Economic Recovery Act, a document containing well over a thousand pages. Cut to inside a supermarket. An African-American man pays for his groceries by wiping his credit card through the ATM reader.

With a movie we could watch the story unfold and by the end we'd understand how these unrelated scenes are somehow connected to each other. But in real life it's not laid out quite so neatly. Connecting seemingly unrelated dots takes mental effort and this process of synthesis is not unlike what we went through in learning to read.

Remember when you were in the primary grades you'd read your story book and struggle to understand those mysterious symbols called letters. You'd struggle to form the sounds of the letters and pronounce one word at a time. As you became a better reader, you learned to recognize phrases and after years of practice you were able to rapidly and nearly effortlessly interpret those symbols. You became an expert at making connections between the ideas represented by those letters.

Then you learned to cheat. Perhaps you'd scan headlines and skip paragraphs to get to the meat of the subject. And, remember your surprise when you discovered that just because something is in print doesn't mean that it's true. You discovered that words can be used to obscure the truth.

Most of us are still at the pre-school level when it comes to reading the media. We don't spend years learning the techniques that conservative radio commentators use to stir people up into a frenzy. We're not usually trained to recognize the effects of colors or music on our emotions and most of us are almost childlike in our acceptance of moving images as being truthful and real.

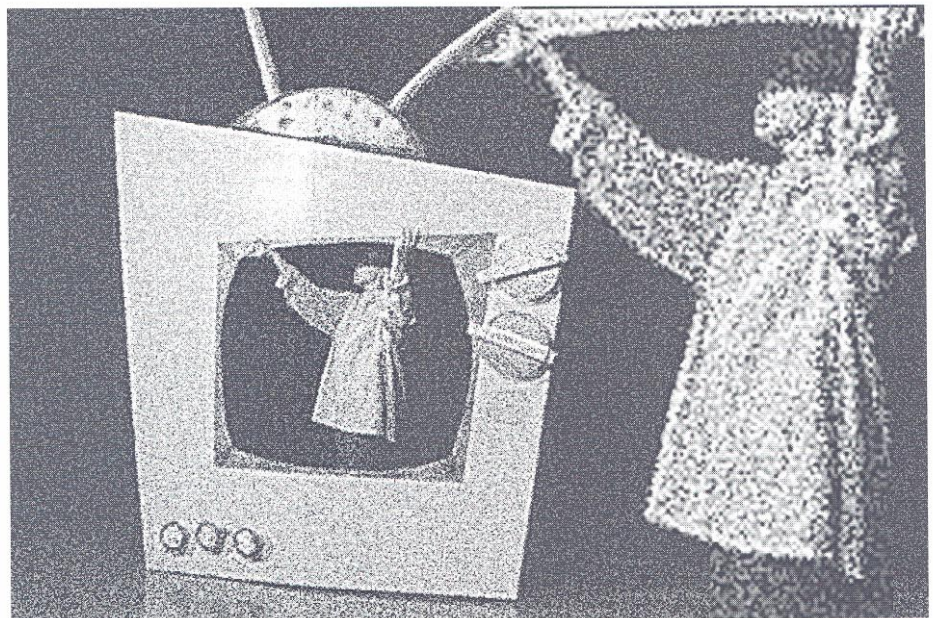
An example: During their New Year's Eve broadcast in 1999, CBS news digitally inserted their logo onto the billboard at Times Square. To viewers at home it looked absolutely real. Newspaper reports later revealed that the people actually in Times Square saw the NBC jumbotron and a Budweiser ad. CBS had altered the reality of the Times Square celebration in order to avoid displaying a competitor's logo.

In another low-tech example we saw on TV the "bi-partisan" standing ovation that George W. Bush received from the Texas Legislature when he was finally able to deliver his victory address. Again, a perfectly normal scene—nothing much to question. But the next day *Salon*, the online magazine, reported that the chamber was deliberately packed with Bush supporters for the benefit

of the TV cameras. Democratic legislators had not been invited.

Asking questions is at the heart of media literacy, but it's hard to concentrate on forming the questions when you're constantly distracted by entertaining images and seductive techniques purposely designed to deliver your attention to advertisers. And, most of us fail to realize that moving visual images can arrest your attention like no other force in the universe.

What's needed now is host of survival tactics for a new century. We need tools for ignoring the distractions and landmarks that can help us recognize the truly important points that will enable us to make sense out of the seeming chaos. Here are some suggestions for developing these skills:



**Sometimes you have to step back to see the big picture.**

**Follow the Historical Thread.** Whether it is politics or education, baseball or making fudge, there's a story there. Find your passion and look into it. And be aware that in this digital age there are those who are actively working to alter history for their own ends. The old adage still holds true: those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it.

**Ask the Right Questions.** Learn to distinguish distractions from important information and learn to extract important information from the distractions. You can learn from entertainment shows or commercials if you ask the right questions. For example, guys could ask their wives and girlfriends about the tricks used to boost the physical attributes of those Victoria's Secrets models.

**You May Have to Go Out of the Country to Get Your News.** "News is what somebody wants to suppress, everything else is advertising," said Lord Northcliffe, one-time owner of the *Times of London*. Corporate consolidation of the media makes it harder to find the real story. Avenues for disseminating alternative media are constantly under attack. Be creative, use the internet, and search for your news.

**In the Digital Age, All Roads Lead to Home.** Although it is still possible to access worldwide information and disinformation



freely through the internet, every time you visit a website you leave an electronic trail that leads back to your computer. The National Security Agency has for some time used powerful computer programs to search telephone conversations to detect terrorist attacks and identify other major threats to the nation's security. In this brave, new, digital world you can bet that someone has already figured out a way to shut down pesky political websites using e-warfare bombs and viruses.

**Practice Connecting the Dots.** Here's one way of connecting our hypothetical movie scenario.

**1. At the Bank.** After June 25, 1968 U.S. currency was not backed by silver or gold or anything other than faith in the paper printed by the U.S. Government. This step paved the way for the electronic financial transactions that we use today.

**2. At the Reagan Ranch.** Ordinary folks placed their faith in President Reagan, the so-called "Great Communicator." Yet, hidden among the several thousand pages of *The Economic Recovery Act of 1981* were provisions that disproportionately slashed taxes for specific wealthy individuals and corporations. In their book, *America: Who Really Pays the Taxes*, Barlett and Steele detail how this was just one of the many tax reform packages that led to a staggering \$1.1 trillion national debt in 1993, and an enormous transfer of wealth from a shrinking middle class to a minute handful of the wealthy.

**3. At the Supermarket.** Electronic financial transactions are now a reality and many in the middle class are struggling to keep their heads above the increasingly choppy financial waters. According to the Federal Reserve Board, U.S. consumers in 1999 carried \$7 trillion in debt—up from \$3.55 trillion in 1990. While we kept reading throughout the '90s that the economy was booming, rising costs helped increase our use of plastic instead of paychecks to purchase everyday necessities like transportation, shelter and food. And who controls that debt? The tiny handful of the wealthy who have the money to lend. See #2 above.

**Finally, Connect with People.** Whether through your media center, relationships in your city or neighborhood, or through online communities, you are building connections with the truly important dots—the members of your own community. People who work together on a project or learn the real stories of their neighbors learn to not be afraid of each other. Through communication, we break down barriers of fear and isolation that interfere with being responsible citizens in a media age.

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## MEDIA LITERACY RESOURCES ON-LINE

**Laurie's Web Pick:** The Media Literacy Clearinghouse  
<http://www.med.sc.edu:81/medialit/>

This is a very comprehensive site dedicated to media literacy resources from many sectors. Organized like an easy-to-read FAQ, the site provides links to information on everything from media literacy basics to gender representation issues, print and motion pictures to health and prevention resources.

Best of all there are many perspectives represented. It is truly a media literacy clearinghouse and not representing a single ideology. There are links to national experts as well as individual efforts. There are links to materials created by media educators, researchers, and members of our own community media field. There is also a discussion listserv.

The only downsides are a few outdated (and now inactive links), the rather complicated URL and the possibility of resource overload. But these represent a small price to pay for top-quality information.

**Renee's Web Pick:** The Media Literacy Online Project  
(University of Oregon)  
<http://interact.uoregon.edu/MediaLit/HomePage>

Gary Ferrington's hyperlink-friendly site from the University of Oregon is a must-visit for all media lit web surfers. According to many in media literacy, the University of Oregon site helps link people to many aspects of media literacy—and connects to initiatives in many countries. It is also a good place to learn about upcoming events, conferences, meetings and other gatherings. Most importantly, there is a searchable archive that helps you find exactly what you're looking for in the huge database of materials. From this site you can go just about anywhere you want in the world of media literacy.

### OTHER RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Alliance for Media Literate America	<a href="http://www.nmec.org">http://www.nmec.org</a>
Media Awareness Network	<a href="http://www.media-awareness.ca/">http://www.media-awareness.ca/</a>
Center for Media Literacy	<a href="http://www.medialit.org">http://www.medialit.org</a>
Assignment Media Literacy	<a href="http://www.assignmentmedialit.com">http://www.assignmentmedialit.com</a>
Just Think Foundation	<a href="http://www.justthink.org">http://www.justthink.org</a>
Listen Up!	<a href="http://www.listenup.org">http://www.listenup.org</a>
National Alliance for Media Arts & Culture	<a href="http://www.namac.org">http://www.namac.org</a>
Media Literacy Project	<a href="http://www.babson.edu/medialiteracyproject">http://www.babson.edu/medialiteracyproject</a>
New Mexico Media Literacy Project	<a href="http://www.nmmlp.org">http://www.nmmlp.org</a>
Adbusters Media Foundation	<a href="http://www.adbusters.org">http://www.adbusters.org</a>
Center for Media & Democracy	<a href="http://www.prwatch.org">http://www.prwatch.org</a>





## A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MEDIA LITERACY

by Faith Rogow

In Austin, Texas in June 2001, the Alliance for a Media Literate America (AMLA) formally comes into existence as a national membership organization dedicated to bringing together all Americans who recognize the value of media literacy skills as an essential component of literacy for the 21st century.

Formerly known as the Partnership for Media Education (PME), the Alliance for a Media Literate America was established in 1997 by four women leaders in the U.S. media literacy movement who formed a public/private collaboration in order to stimulate professional development in the then-fledgling media literacy field. Their primary goal was to organize and host an annual national conference at which educators and practitioners could come together to learn the principles of media education in a venue that both exemplified and modeled the best practices in the field—in essence, a national forum for diverse views, visions and voices.

The 1997 conference in Colorado Springs, Colorado was attended by over 450 media literacy leaders from 41 states and six countries, demonstrating the beginnings of a critical mass for media literacy education. In 1999, a second acclaimed conference in St. Paul, Minnesota led to the growth of the organization, as the PME board nominated and elected new board members to reflect the widening commitment of national and regional education, health, and community-based organizations to the movement.

"The most pressing needs for the growth of media literacy can be accomplished only through the development of a national membership organization," according to Frank Baker, past president of the AMLA. "There has been an explosive surge of interest in this topic among educators, public health professionals, and community and civic leaders. The time is right to provide opportunities for these individuals to learn and grow from each others' experiences, to encourage the development of professional stan-

dards and best practices, and to promote the importance of media literacy as an essential life skill."

What is needed in order for the media literacy movement to grow? We in the AMLA believe that these elements are most critical:

**A place for diverse practitioners to meet.** Separated by fields, people who develop and implement media literacy programs in their communities tend not to attend the same professional conferences or read the same magazines or journals. In short, the opportunities to talk across disciplines are rare. For example, those cable access practitioners who are incorporating media literacy into access training may never encounter middle-school teachers who are doing the same thing in a social studies course, or learn about pediatricians, often in nearby communities, who are providing parent-education talks about how to build media literacy skills in the home. Through its conferences, website and publications, the AMLA will serve as a bridge, fostering communication among people working in different fields.

**Professionalization.** As with most subjects, there are debates about how best to teach media literacy and how we judge whether or not someone does it well. Like the role that professional education organizations play, the AMLA hopes to help define a research agenda, disseminate results, define promising practices, and credential practitioners based on the best research available.

**Resources & Training.** Like teachers of any other subject, teachers who are expected to teach media literacy need appropriate resources and training. As increasing numbers of people recognize the need for media literacy education, the demand for professional development also increases. In response, the AMLA will facilitate the development of high-quality training at the community level and in institutions of higher education as well as

on-line. We also intend to serve as a clearinghouse and referral agency for schools, programs, and organizations looking for professional development opportunities.

**U.S.-Oriented Approach.** Other countries have been involved in media literacy for many years and we have much to learn from their example. However, to be effective in the U.S., media literacy initiatives must be tailored to situations that are uniquely American, including the decentralized structure of the U.S. school system, the nearly exclusive commercial control of American media, and the sheer availability of media technologies.

**National Presence, National Voice.** To have a long-term impact, media literacy educators need to make a strong and

*The time is right to provide opportunities to learn and grow from each others' experiences and to encourage the development of professional standards and best practices.*

clear case for media literacy education to the government, the public, and the press. The best way to do that is with a broad, national, inclusive representative voice. As a membership organization, the AMLA is establishing itself as a national membership organization best qualified and equipped to provide that voice.

Lynda Bergsma, AMLA board member and co-chair of the 2001 National Media Education Conference in Austin, Texas recognizes the important contribution of cable access professionals to the media literacy movement. According to Bergsma, "One of the reasons why the media literacy movement has grown is because cable access has provided communities with opportunities to create community media. When people make media, it changes the way they see themselves as media consumers. We expect that cable access leaders will continue to be important leaders in the media literacy movement in next important phase of its growth."

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# THE GREAT DEBATES CIRCA 2001

## THE PROMISE AND THE POTENTIAL OF MEDIA LITERACY

by Renee Hobbs

At the founding convention of the Cultural Environment Movement in St. Louis in 1996, Bob McCannon of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project noted that whenever the media literacy people get together, they always circle the wagons—and shoot at each other! Of course, there's a reason for this: people have diverse understandings of the promise and the potential of media literacy. Some see media literacy as an inherently valuable life skill, or as a tool to improve the quality of education, or as a means to promote creative self-expression. Others see its value in helping people to reject the destructive messages often found in contemporary mass media, or to build future audiences for alternative media, or to mobilize people to reform how media are regulated. Still others want to use media literacy to help young people make healthy lifestyle choices.

As the media literacy movement gains momentum in the United States, our increasingly diverse community of educators, community organizers and activists, scholars, social service and media professionals have a lot of issues to debate, because media literacy can take many different forms. Some say the arguments and squabbling that arises about media literacy is just the inevitable conflict of personalities and power dynamics that emerge in any diverse group. But I have long contended that the great debates represent a most important phase in the media literacy movement's evolution, as participants define those goals, practices and strategies that will be most productive and begin to abandon the ideas that are peripheral, distracting or off-target as we develop a shared vision for what it means to help people "ask questions about what they watch, see and read."

What are those shared goals? By looking at the seven great debates, we can see the ways in which consensus is emerging—and still not emerging—about our central mission, about the values and belief systems that sustain us. A lot has changed since I first identified the great debates in 1996. Here's my assessment of the way the great debates now look in 2001, after a five-year period where the media literacy movement has grown exponentially.

### 1. Does media literacy protect kids?

There is still some tension about claims that media literacy can work to protect children from a deeply flawed culture, but the furor that this debate once caused has lessened considerably in recent years. Fans of Neil Postman still agree with him that media literacy is just about the only antidote for a culture where we continue to amuse ourselves to death, where information has replaced knowledge, where style has replaced substance, where violence is the major form of entertainment, and where we let technology drive the quality of our lives without reflection or analysis.

But more American media literacy advocates are siding with scholars like David Buckingham, who wonders about why we have to see children as victims who need to be rescued from the

*Our great debates help us to define those goals, practices and strategies that will be most productive and allow us to begin to abandon those ideas that are peripheral, distracting or off-target.*

excesses and evils of their culture, which is simply the intersection of high technology, mass media and consumer capitalism at the end of the 20th century. Excessive focus on the 'problematic' features of the mass media may cause us to neglect or undervalue children's emotional engagement with the media and the genuine pleasures they receive. When used as part of instruction, this approach may inadvertently lead students to substitute cynicism and a sense of superiority over real questioning and analysis.

Whereas in 1996, these two positions seemed in fierce opposition, over the past five years, people have begun to recognize both aspects of the arguments as valuable—only a few academics are still arguing about this, it seems.

### 2. Does media literacy require student media production activities?

This debate has also been largely resolved. Nearly everyone in the media literacy movement recognizes that young people cannot become truly critical viewers until they have had experience making photographs, planning and organizing ideas through storyboards, writing scripts and performing in front of a camera, or designing their own web pages, or reporting a news story. Most agree that media literacy is incomplete unless students get a lot of experience 'writing' as well as 'reading.'

However, in many schools, student media production activities are still undervalued, underfunded, and understaffed. It's hard to measure what students are actually learning when they make their own videos. In many states, classes in media production (including journalism, radio production, website production and video production) are not offered as "college credit" classes, and therefore may not attract high-achieving students. In too many American schools, media production is often the province of the non-readers, the low-ability kids for whom media production is the 'last chance' before dropping out. While media literacy advocates now largely agree that media production is essential, they recognize that many improvements are still needed to provide students with meaningful opportunities to strengthen these skills. They also agree that media production may mean working on the school newspaper, or creating a storyboard, or writing a letter to the editor—that media production need not always include video production to be valuable.

### 3. Should media literacy have a popular culture bias?

This debate is still quite vigorous among media literacy educators, scholars and activists. Some people believe that media literacy skills get learned more effectively from a close examination of a Mountain Dew commercial or an episode of MTV's *Senseless Acts of Video* than from an examination of camera angles in *Citizen Kane* or regular reading of *The New York Times*. Without relevance to "kid culture," media literacy is just another school subject. While an increasing number of scholars and academics write about the need for teachers to make a connection between the school culture and popular culture, teachers often discover ►



# ASSIGNMENT: media LITERACY

by Nancy Brien

**A**ssignment: Media Literacy is a new curriculum resource designed to strengthen media literacy and communication skills and promote reading, writing and critical thinking skills for students in grades K-12. This set of curriculum materials provides teachers with the tools needed to build media analysis skills and explore the complex role of media and technology in our society.

During the 2000-2001 school year, more than 2,000 teachers in the State of Maryland have received a day-long program of staff development to help them integrate media literacy concepts and media production activities into their existing curriculum.

Designed in alignment with State of Maryland curriculum frameworks, Assignment: Media Literacy embeds media literacy skills into the subject areas of language arts, social studies, science, math, health education and the fine and performing arts. It is the product of an innovative partnership between the Maryland State Board of Education and Discovery Communications, Inc.

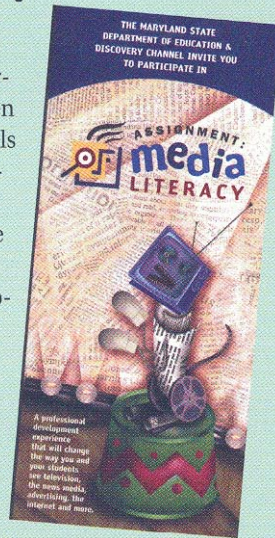
Divided into three levels (elementary, middle, high), each kit contains a curriculum resource book with six instructional units, videotapes with clips keyed to lessons, a book (*Media Wizards* by Catherine Gourley, Millbrook Press) or the SNAPS: PhotoCards for Media Literacy. All together, the curriculum contains over 100 complete lesson plans which can be flexibly used by teachers in all subject areas.

Examples from the curriculum include:

- ▲ Analyzing the levels of realism in different kinds of programs, including news, advertising, infomercials, situation comedies, documentaries, and reality TV programs;
- ▲ Analyzing how media messages shape our understanding of history, with emphasis on colonialism in Africa in the late 19th century;
- ▲ Learning to critically analyze internet web sites to identify messages that are credible, authentic and accurate;
- ▲ Learning to identify how different points of view are found in news, advertising, infomercials, situation comedies, documentaries, and reality TV programs;
- ▲ Reflecting on the addictive qualities of video games and their impact on homework, social relationships and problem-solving;
- ▲ Examining how violence is represented on television news and in various forms of entertainment, including sports;
- ▲ Researching a historical character using an internet web quest and discovering how language and imagery can shape our perceptions of a character from history.

There are 18 production activities offered in the curriculum, including making a public service announcement, writing a treatment, role-playing a panel discussion, and more. Each production activity includes an evaluation rubric to help teachers assess student work. The print curriculum is available online at: [www.assignmentmedialit.com](http://www.assignmentmedialit.com).

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that this approach has its serious personal and professional real-world risks. In one community, a teacher was publicly reprimanded and given a negative evaluation for her decision to use the rap poetry of Tupac Shakur in her high school English classes. The principal was furious at the idea of giving a rapper the same privileges as poets and novelists like Emily Dickenson and William Faulkner. Teachers who use popular culture materials in the classroom can face the vituperative backlash of those who fear that the quality of public education is being "dumbed down" in the ever-increasing effort to just get students to show up and pay attention.

## 4. Is media literacy best taught as a specialist subject or integrated into existing curriculum?

In recent years, this debate has grown less intense as educators agree that both strategies have value. The most important principle is to design and execute effective implementation plans that make optimal use of the human and material resources that already exist in a particular community. In some places, an enthusiastic teacher's energy is best focused on the development of a special elective; in other settings, that teacher will be most effective in teaching other teachers how to apply media literacy across the curriculum. There is no "one-size-fits-all" guideline that is right for every community.

Many fans of integrated approaches are emerging from within mainstream education organizations, like the National Education Association and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. These educators recognize the role of cable access professionals as a community resource in helping students to make use of media production activities for a science or history class. For example, one history teacher in high school explored media literacy concepts through an analysis of images of Asians in media images from 1910 to the present in a course on 20th century history. Students used the cable access center to edit their program and it was aired on the PEG access channel. An English teacher invited students to create marketing campaigns for a book, creating bumper stickers, print ads, video promotions, graphics, radio ads, and other media messages. A ninth grade science teacher had students conduct a shot-by-shot visual analysis of two different documentaries about the Exxon-Valdez environmental disaster, one produced by Jacques Cousteau and the other produced and distributed by Exxon.

However, the downside of "across the curriculum" approaches is also beginning to be evident, as more and more examples of "bad media literacy" is seen. Teachers who have had only a scattershot exposure to media literacy may inadvertently trivialize the process of critical inquiry. Many who advocate that media literacy be taught as a separate subject often come to this after having observed teachers doing astonishingly trivial or superficial work. Such work is often called "media literacy malpractice." In the next



five years, I predict that this great debate will heat up as consensus begins to emerge about what constitutes effective (and ineffective) practice in school and out-of-school settings.

#### **5. Should media literacy have a more explicit emphasis on promoting political or social change?**

Some media critics are disturbed by what they see as the oversimplified rhetoric of media literacy, which seems to be designed to have something-for-everyone. Media literacy practitioners have diverse and uncoordinated ideological positions concerning important issues in broadcast regulation, commercialism in the classroom, and media ownership and centralization. Some media literacy programs do not emphasize the dangers of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other social injustices. According to some advocates, media literacy educators must position themselves as change agents in helping young people take specific actions towards specific forms of social or political change.

Others believe that narrowly defining a specific ideological agenda in relation to media literacy is itself antithetical to genuine critical thinking. People from many different ideological perspectives are attracted to media literacy, from folks in the Bible Belt helping students understand how inhumanity and violence masquerades as humor, to progressive educators in private schools in New York City helping students understand that the insanity of advertising makes people feel inadequate in order to sell them products they don't need.

If media literacy is defined as “the process of asking questions about what you watch, see and read,” then respecting the diversity of how people may respond to complex social and political issues becomes increasingly important. From a pragmatic point of view, some educators believe that an overt political agenda is unlikely to be accepted in the context of mainstream public education. In practice, media literacy is most likely to enter the schools under the de-politicized rubric of expanding the concept of ‘literacy.’

Over the past five years, this debate seems to have become more polarized, especially among scholars and activists, some of whom write about “critical media literacy” in an effort to distinguish their work from other approaches that emphasize a either a student-centered agenda or an open inquiry-centered stance towards the exploration of political or social issues. I expect this argument to heat up over the next five years as groups of like-minded people identify the various and complex ways in which they see media literacy contributing to the on-going process of social and political change.

#### **6. Can media literacy ever reach large numbers of students in K-12 American schools?**

The debate still rages on this one. Nearly 40 percent of media literacy advocates do not work in elementary or secondary education. A number of important philanthropic leaders are attracted to the field of “youth media” programs in community organizations and other after-school settings because they fear that schools, as institutions designed to conserve and maintain the social status quo, are unlikely to change within the next twenty years in the fairly dramatic ways that media literacy would

require. For example, instead of reading eight classic novels in the 10th grade, students would read four books, study two films, a newsmagazine and a web site. Only a tiny number of schools have made these kinds of changes, even though they have been recommended by among the most respected of education reformers and curriculum specialists. For example, the Pacesetter Program, sponsored by the College Board, now includes a rich and meaningful emphasis on media literacy concepts.

A number of media literacy leaders believe that the best, most realistic site for kids to develop media literacy skills is in after-school programs, summer camps, religious education programs, library and prevention programs, in community-based organizations, and at home with parental guidance.

#### **7. Should media literacy initiatives be supported financially by media corporations?**

This debate has intensified over the past five years as more and more media companies have become interested in media literacy for a variety of different strategic, political, economic and philosophical reasons. A number of media literacy advocates fear that all funds come with strings attached, and that the National Cable Television Association, the Discovery Channel, *The New York Times*, *Newsweek* and other firms are cleverly taking advantage of educators who are so underfunded and desperate for materials that they'll jump at anything that's provided for free. According to this view, media organizations are effectively taking the ‘anti-media’

stand out of the media literacy movement to serve their own goals. Some media literacy leaders believe that the media industry is co-opting the media literacy movement, softening it to make sure that public criticism of the media never gets too loud, abrasive or strident.

However, an equally large number of educators and media literacy leaders have been delighted that leaders in cable television, the internet, publishing and print media have used their large budgets and large megaphones to help raise awareness about the value and relevance of media literacy skills. According to these leaders, media organizations have a social responsibility to help people develop critical thinking about the media as a kind of consumer skill. Over the past five years, media organizations have been an important part of the growth curve, funding the development of curriculum materials that make it easier for educators to begin the challenging process of implementing media literacy in the classroom.

**Conclusion.** Public access leaders who are committed to improving their communities play an important role in the future of the media literacy movement. The way the “great debates” get answered will shape the future of the media literacy movement. The next five years will be a critical period in determining whether the movement can capitalize on our nation's growing awareness that something has to change about our relationship and dependence on media culture. Be part of the great debates and help to shape the future of this emerging field!

*Renee Hobbs is associate professor of communication at Babson College and a member of the board of directors of the Alliance for a Media Literate America (AMLA). Email: reneehobbs@aol.com.*



# TWISTED PAIR

## MEDIA LITERACY & PUBLIC ACCESS

by Norman Cowie

*"Mr. Disney, we are returning your Duck. Feathers plucked and well roasted. Look inside and you can see the handwriting on the wall, our hands still writing on the wall: Donald, Go Home!"*

—Preface to the English Edition, *How to Read Donald Duck*,  
Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart

### Media Literacy meets Donald Duck.

Written in 1971 in revolutionary Chile to arm the populace against imperialist ideologies in U.S. popular culture, *How to Read Donald Duck* might be described as a classic media literacy text, in every country but our own. For in our country, mainstream approaches to media literacy tiptoe around issues of power, class and political economy for fear of offending middle-class and wealthy parents and potential corporate partners, many of whom take the form of media mega-mergers like, well, Disney.

In the United States, media literacy means "active viewing" rather than activism. Is this a problem? I think so, for unless the media literacy movement links its rhetoric of citizen empowerment to a politics of social and cultural change, it can finally only function as a source of legitimation for those industries, representational forms, and educational models that it ostensibly seeks to critique.

Where might media literacy proponents look for ideas on how to integrate a critique of the media with an effort to transform the media? To public access and the community media movement, were it not for...

### Public Access and Wayne's World.

Perusing back issues of *CMR*, there are many extraordinary articles on what public access can and should be, which often begin like this: "Public access is not about television, it's about communication."

While the subtext of this argument is undoubtedly clear to the readership of this publication, the channels are still the public face of access: many centers remain focused on the needs of programming them, and many people remain turned off by what they see on them. Despite our rhetoric, public access continues to be experienced as television in our culture: from the tools, the training and the programs, to the contexts of reception, to the codes and conventions that make programs intelligible, to the expectations and assumptions that constitute "public access" in public discourse, to the Hometown festival highlights reel.

Moreover, the idea that public access is not about TV squanders an extraordinary opportunity: to produce programming that seeks to politicize its public as a way to ensure its own survival. If this sounds fantastic, I would ask you to consider what corporate television does everyday.

Suppose for a moment that public access can be about communication and television: it might be worth considering how

television communicates. And where might we turn to explore this concept? To media literacy, of course, were it not for...

### Kingdoms of Protectionism.

To many, the appeal of the term "media literacy" lies in its emphasis on media "reading" and "writing." For this reason, you'd think that media literacy and public access would be a natural fit. However, many media literacy advocates don't know what to make of access, with the exception of the protectionists, who preach abstinence in relation to all forms of television and join Congress in moral panics from time to time.

For those opposed to feudalism, there are media and cultural studies affinity groups whose members are considerably less welcome in Washington. They argue that TV isn't bad, or inherently biased (as Jeffrey Scheuer would lead us to believe in his retro-techno-determinist press release reprinted in the last issue of *CMR*). Instead, they're liable to say: "It's the social system, stupid!" and what politician wants to hear that?

Media studies scholars argue that televisual communication is a process of encoding and decoding, and that TV programs are complex sign systems that require active interpretation. They suggest there is an inherent risk in this transaction: that the meanings that are encoded by a producer (his or her "intentions") may or may not be "properly" decoded by a viewer/reader.

The risk of misinterpretation increases when producers encode meanings in ways that viewers are unaccustomed to, which, they suggest, is why "difficult" art or video is often dismissed by people who have not been trained to interpret it.

In our culture, we have been relentlessly trained by commercial television to be able interpreters of corporately produced meanings. Many of us derive pleasure from our readings, whether they are the "preferred" ones that correspond to a marketer's dream, the transgressive ones of their nightmares, or something in between. We have not, however, been well trained to interpret meanings from other places, particularly when those places appear solipsistic, aesthetically depleted or didactic and are wedged in the cacophony of commercial clutter.

Where might we turn to receive the kinds of training that we need to rethink what it means to speak from another place? To public access, of course, were it not for the ...

### First Come, First Served, First Amendment Bogey.

Cultural studies scholars argue that television is the domi-

*Unless the media literacy movement links its rhetoric of citizen empowerment to a politics of social and cultural change, it can finally only function as a source of legitimation for those industries.*



nant means of social signification in our culture, and that the ability to control the symbolic field means nothing less than the power to impose a selective construction of social reality.

This realization has drawn many activists to work in media, has resulted in classics like *How to Read Donald Duck*, and continues to inform corporate and state media policies. Within our hyper-commercialized media culture, public access clearly has a role to play as a non-commercial public space. However, what kind of public space is it, and what role is it playing?

The powerful seem generally willing to let public access continue as a form of spectacle, for it is an excellent safety valve for dissent, it suggests how TV would look if they were not in control, and it publicly affirms their tolerance for "difference." One might assume that if public access posed a significant challenge to elite constructions of the world, the Rudy Giuliani's of the world would be attempting to drive it bankrupt.

In 1992, Robert Devine wrote: "Public access is the last best hope for a public sphere and for an active and enlightened polity." (CTR, Volume 15, Number 6, p: 9.)

However, to envision public access as a public sphere, as Devine did so eloquently, means fundamentally rethinking the discourse of the channels and their relation to a public. It means privileging certain speakers (the symbolically disenfranchised and certain forms of speech) (dialogue for the common good) over others in an effort to address public needs and create new forms of civic participation.

It also means creating curricula for would be producers that combines issues from media studies and community development with television production, in order to facilitate the realization of compelling, innovative and truly alternative forms of communication.

Perhaps then our channel and web surfing public will be able to identify the place from which public access speaks, and think that democratic media doesn't look so bad after all.

---

*Norman Cowie is a media artist who teaches in the visual arts program at Fordham University in New York City. Email: cowie@fordham.edu.*

## INTERVIEW: MAKING THE ML CONNECTION

by Lesley Johnson

*From an interview with Bill Nay, community programming manager of Shrewsbury Public Access Connection, in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts.*

### **Q: Why do access and education need each other?**

We both are striving for the same ultimate goal: to educate the community and provide information that people can use to improve their lives. We want to give voice for those that don't seem to have one in mainstream America. My sense is that most educators are trying to do the same.

### **Q: What interferes with access people working with educators?**

From own experience I've found that it can be primarily a matter of financial issues. Access centers often don't have enough money to pay for educators who need some kind of incentive to do projects outside of school time. This seems more so now than in years past when teachers seemed more willing to do things outside of class time if it helped their kids. As salaries haven't risen the way they should, teachers are often looking for compensation for additional tasks.

Another problem is that often the people involved with access may be considered "too fringe" by school administrators. Of course, this isn't true for every access center but often I see the access center managers or staff considered by community leaders as "oddballs" or "quirky." Sometimes there is a clique of people, especially in smaller towns, which can magnify these kinds of personality differences and create a problem. A tough challenge for access folks is to get involvement from a majority of people. Mainstream media have portrayed access people as a bunch of weirdos when in fact, the reality is that 90 percent of access people represent community organizations, groups who use access to get their message out.

### **Q: What attitudes do educators have that interfere with their involvement in access?**

These days, a lot of involvement of education with access center comes from school administrators. One common model is that the superintendent does his own show in the high school and access people videotape the school committee meetings. From some administrators, I have sensed there is an underlying reluctance about teachers appearing on camera or doing production work. A lot of administrators want things to be "perfect" to represent the school system. They don't want anything to look half-done. They may turn away programs done by citizens because the quality isn't up to snuff. Access encourages anyone to participate—we know that people will improve as they use production tools. In some communities, there is pressure from school administrators to be perfect right out of the gate. That attitude has caused many people to stop before they begin.

### **Q: What advice do you have for access people interested in working more effectively with educators?**

First, approach the administration and offer an after-school program for students to learn video production. Such programs can be effective from first grade through high school. In our district, the production class we offer through the access center is available as a credit-granting course for students. A video club can also be effective to get a relationship started with school administrators.

Also, if possible, offer the school department a program or two. Invite the superintendent to do a show about something important to community. That kind of goodwill effort goes far to get the rest of the school community to be supportive. For our *Homework Connection* show, we had to get a lot of support from teachers. We tracked down and focused on the head of the math department, who was 100 percent behind the idea. She brought some teachers into the project who had originally thought it would be too much extra work. But now a lot of the teachers support the program and are glad it's there.

---

*Lesley Johnson, a former library media specialist and school administrator, is now the associate director of the Media Literacy Project at Babson College and the author of Media, Education and Change.*



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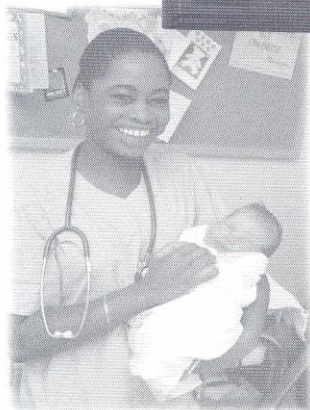
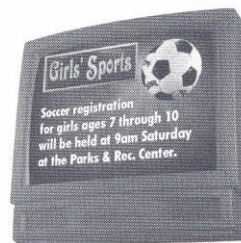
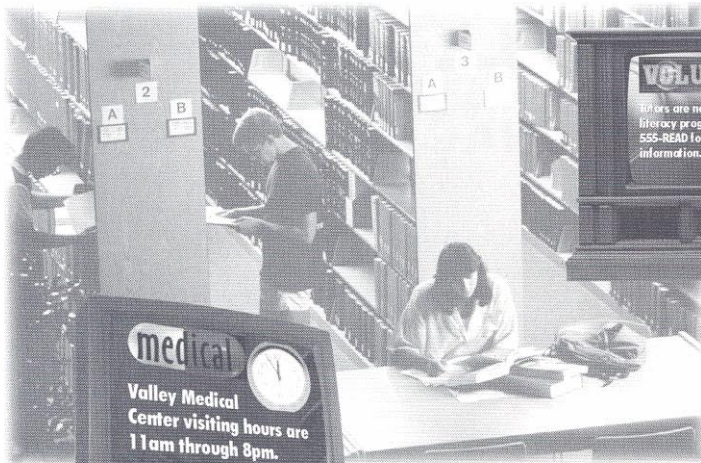
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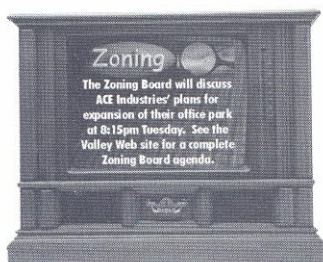


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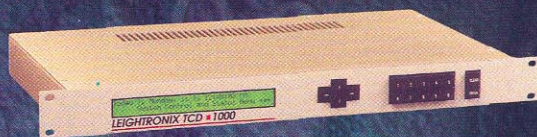
MPEG Video/Audio Playback • PRO-BUS Control for up to 16 VCRs/LDPs/DVDs • 4x3VAA Routing Switcher with Video Detection • Control for Select External Routing Switchers • Network Access and Control



## **TCD-1000** Event Controller

### *Ideal for Expanding Systems*

LGX-BUS & PRO-BUS Control for up to 64 VCRs/LDPs/DVDs • Control for Select External Routing Switchers up to 99x64 • GPI Inputs & Outputs



## **PRO-16** Event Controller

### *The All-In-One Playback Solution*

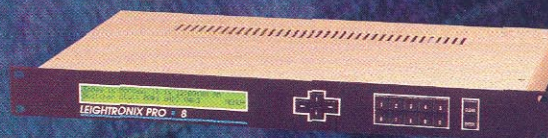
PRO-BUS Control for up to 16 VCRs/LDPs/DVDs • Internal 16x4VAA Routing Switcher with Video Detection • WinEM-LT Scheduling Software Included



## **PRO-8** Event Controller

### *A Smaller Version of the PRO-16*

PRO-BUS Control for up to 16 VCRs/LDPs/DVDs • Internal 8x3VAA Routing Switcher with Video Detection • WinEM-LT Scheduling Software Included



## **MINI-T-PRO** Event Controller

### *The Low-Cost Playback Solution*

PRO-BUS Control for up to 16 VCRs/LDPs/DVDs • Internal 8x1VA Routing Switcher with Video Detection • WinEM-LT Scheduling Software Included



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